



NEWS RELEASE

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Vegetation maintenance starts at Woonsocket Project

CONCORD, Mass. –The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District started vegetation maintenance on Nov. 10, 2010 at the federally-owned Woonsocket Flood Damage Reduction Project in Woonsocket, R.I. The work, to be completed by contractor Jennifer M. Cook, Inc., of Upton, Mass., will remove and dispose of heavy wooded vegetation along the side slopes and crests of earthen levees/dikes, along channel improvement slopes and adjacent to floodwalls along the Blackstone, Mill and Peters Rivers.

All vegetation within 15 feet of the toe of the land and water sides of the levees/dikes, and the floodwalls will be cut and removed. Root balls of trees greater than 4 inches in diameter will be removed along the levees/dikes and the levees/dikes repaired accordingly. All vegetation along the channel improvement areas will be cut and removed to the top of the floodway. Herbicide spray will be used to control vegetation. The work will take about 6 or 7 months to complete.

The devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought the issue of levee safety to the forefront of public debate in recent years. Findings of subsequent Corps investigations into the performance of the flood damage reduction systems pointed to a need for a periodic, comprehensive and risk-informed approach to levee safety. The Corps has been working together with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide them findings of Corps levee inspections and assessments for their use in making decisions in the National Flood Insurance Program.

The Corps and FEMA are working together to ensure that flood hazard maps clearly reflect the flood protection capabilities of the levees, and that the maps accurately represent the flood risks posed to those protected areas. The Woonsocket project was decertified under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) administered by FEMA in May 2007 because the agency determined the project no longer provides protection from the base flood level. As a result, property owners behind the project are now paying flood insurance.

The Corps has begun the process of rehabilitating this project in the hope that it can once again comply with the requirements of the FEMA NFIP certification program so that flood insurance would no longer be required. One step is to perform this one-time major vegetation maintenance followed up by an annual maintenance program to prevent the regrowth of vegetation. Another step is to perform repairs to the Woonsocket Falls Dam. Contract work has already begun to repair the dam.

The Woonsocket Flood Damage Reduction Project protects industrial and commercial establishments and densely populated residential areas from flood flows on the Blackstone, Peters and Mill Rivers. It was constructed in response to flood damage that occurred due to heavy rains in August 1955 that caused \$22 million in damage.

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